

Fresno health care system, doctor group settle over 'unprecedented neurosurgeon walkout'

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After a 2020 dispute between Fresno's biggest health care system and a physicians group put in jeopardy the central San Joaquin Valley's only Level I trauma center status, the two sides have reached a settlement following a lawsuit.

Community Health System announced Monday in a press release a \$1.2 million settlement with the Central California Faculty Medical Group, now called Inspire Health Medical Group. The agreement is the result of a lawsuit filed in September 2021 by CHS alleging breach of contract, breach of good faith and fair dealing, and intentional contract interference.

"While the \$1.2 million settlement CCFMG will pay does not fully address the disruption caused by the unprecedented neurosurgeon walkout, it does reinforce that business disputes should never impact [patient care](#) and the health of our community," Craig Wagoner, chief operating officer of CHS, said in the release.

Community Health System (formerly Community Medical Centers) is the largest, locally owned [health care system](#) in the central San Joaquin Valley and owns downtown Fresno's Community Regional Medical Center as well as Clovis Community Medical Center.

2020 doctor walkout in Fresno

Trauma services were interrupted at the downtown hospital in September 2020 when the Central California Faculty Medical Group, a physicians group contracted by CHS, announced that a contract for six neurosurgeons expired at midnight on Sept. 2, 2020. Stalled negotiations between CCFMG and CHS led to the discontinuation of critical trauma services for several days.

The doctor walkout forced the hospital to transfer at least 21 patients out

of Fresno during the COVID-19 pandemic and the Creek Fire, according to The Fresno Bee's reporting on the dispute in 2020. The [trauma center](#) at Community Regional Medical Center in downtown Fresno was put at risk by the interruption of services.

The suit was one of four separate lawsuits involving multiple different physicians groups that piled up during fall 2021.

"By putting this unfortunate dispute behind us, we hope to repair the relationship with CCFMG that Community has had for decades and focus on providing the best possible care for the Central Valley," Wagner said.

Inspire Health statement on settlement

Inspire Health Medical Group is a group of 300 doctors physicians that provides care at 20 local hospitals and [health care facilities](#), including Community Health System, according to its website.

In an email statement to The Bee, a spokesperson for Inspire Health Medical Group stressed that its focus since its inception in 1979 has been to ensure patients have access to "the highest caliber physicians" and that [medical students](#) in Fresno have access to outstanding faculty and mentors.

"Although CCFMG believes that its actions, at all times, were appropriate, it also believes providing the highest caliber physicians and staff best serves our community at this time," the statement said. "As such, we look forward to closing this chapter in our history in order to dedicate valuable time and resources to what matters to us most, caring for our patients and the people of the Central Valley."

"At the advice of counsel, we have no other statements at this time," the

statement concluded.

The suit was scheduled to go to trial July 1, court records show.

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